



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2025, 7:00 PM

IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE: TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT
REMOTE ATTENDANCE: VIA ZOOM MEETING

PRESENT: In Person: Chairman Sean Kelly; Via Zoom: Vice Chairman Donna Resutek, Regular Members Chris Todd, David Hurley, Cynthia Soto (Arrived at 7:03), and Alternate Amos Smith

ABSENT: Alternates Sam Chang and Michael Swanson

STAFF

PRESENT: Lisa M. Houlihan, Town Planner and Ashley DuBois, Recording Clerk

III. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Sean Kelly called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS (on non-agenda items): None

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

BY CONSENSUS, THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MOVED TO ADD TO THE AGENDA DISCUSSION FOR AN AMENDMENT TO THE TAX ABATEMENT AGREEMENT FOR ELLINGTON RACQUET CLUB TO REVISE THE START DATE OF ABATEMENT. ITEM WILL BE DISCUSSED UNDER ACTIVE BUSINESS #2.

BY CONSENSUS, THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MOVED TO ADD TO THE AGENDA DISCUSSION FOR A POTENTIAL NETWORKING MEETING FOR ELLINGTON BUSINESSES. ITEM TO BE DISCUSSED UNDER ACTIVE BUSINESS #6.

1. Discuss Shop Ellington 2024 and Conduct Raffle Drawing

Chairman Kelly started the raffle drawing by asking commissioners if they had a preference to who drew the raffle winners from the present, in-person individuals. These individuals included Chairman Kelly, Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, and Ashley DuBois, Recording Clerk. The commissioners stated no preference, and the in-person individuals shared the honor.

Lisa Houlihan remarked the Shop Ellington 2024 event was the fifth annual campaign promoted by the Economic Development Commission and it was advertised through North Central News, Town Newsletter, social media, direct invites to businesses, The Patch, Ellington Farmers Market, and with assistance from commissioners. A thank you was shared to commissioners who signed businesses up to participate. Lisa noted there were 20 businesses that participated this year (listed below). Additionally, 20 individuals submitted bingo cards for the raffle drawing for eight \$25 prepaid gift cards. The campaign generated 152 customer visits.

The following businesses participated in this year's event:

- Arlo Leather Goods (<https://arloleathergoods.square.site>)
- Backroads BBQ - 292 Sandy Beach Rd
- Benware Automotive - 408D Somers Rd
- Cooley's Kitchen – 175 West Road, #10
- Dzen Garden Center – 187 Windsorville Rd
- Ellington Agway - 74 West Rd (Small Business Sat. 10 am-3pm & Goodies Samples)
- Ellington Depot - 1 Crystal Lake Rd
- Ellington Farmers' Market - Ellington High School -37 Maple St
- Ellington Fine Consignments - 12 Main St
- Ellington Printery - 25B West Rd
- Joe's Fine Wines & Spirits – 43 West Rd
- Johnny Appleseed's Farm Fruit Stand - 185 West Rd (Daily Raffle Prize for Shop Ellington Patrons)
- JRego's - 175 West Rd
- LuAnn's Bakery & Café - 238 Somers Rd
- LuAnn's Coffee & Good Eats - 140 West Rd
- Mercantile at Nellie McKnight Museum - 70 Main St
- Neil's Fine Wines & Liquor - 175 West Rd
- The Eyeglass Place of Ellington – 175 West Rd
- The Gold & Diamond Exchange – 8 West Rd
- Trattoria daLepri – 89 West Rd

The winners of the Shop Ellington 2024 Raffle Drawing are as follows: Bruce Harding, Doug Harding, The Banks, Banks, Pat Halpin, Ann McLaughlin, Barb Gibbons, and Patricia Mary Witinok. Congratulations to all winners.

Chairman Kelly remarked on another successful event and looks forward to the continued success in the new year. He supports the expanded timeframe allotted this past year to give people more time to support and shop local businesses, especially during the holiday season. Chairman Kelly shared a thank you to all who were involved and participated in the event.

2. Tax Incentive/Abatement Programs

Chairman Kelly began the discussion in regard to supporting an amendment to the Tax Abatement Agreement for the Ellington Racquet Club to modify the start date for the reduced assessment to include Grand List 2024 and then turned the floor to Lisa Houlihan.

Lisa Houlihan began by noting the history of the abatement application of the Ellington Racquet Club (ERC). On October 11, 2023, after reviewing an application from ERC, the commission recommended a tax abatement be forwarded to the Board of Selectmen (BOS). The BOS endorsed the recommendation and requested the Town Attorney draft an agreement so it would be present at the Town Meeting. There was a public hearing, and an abatement was approved on December 11, 2023. The agreement was then signed on January 24, 2024, and the Certificate of Occupancy (C.O.) was issued on October 17, 2024. In the agreement, paragraph 5 states there will be no decrease in assessment or abatement of the taxes for the Grand List October 1, 2023, or any tax list prior to C.O. Since the C.O. was issued after October 1st, which falls under the new Grand List, ERC is not eligible for abatement for 2024 and assessed in accordance with normal practices. The Town Assessor advised ERC via a letter in December that the estimated tax would be over \$50,000, first half due July 1, 2025, and second half due January 1, 2026. After conversation with various town departments, ERC sent a letter to the First Selectman/Town Administrator's Office asking that "the Town of Ellington adjust the agreement, as is allowed, to include the October 17th 2024, certificate of occupancy date for tax abatement program initiation". The matter was referred to the Town Attorney and found the town

took all the correct steps to approve the abatement. Furthermore, the policy provides the BOS the discretion to adjust the terms of the agreement, such as the timing of the reduced assessment period. Since the Economic Development Commission's role is to determine eligibility, the Town Attorney recommended the Commission reviews it first and if so inclined to support an abatement revision send a positive referral to the BOS.

Chairman Kelly noted the issue is the Certificate of Occupancy was issued 17 days after October 1st, which is when the abatement would have needed to be effective. Chairman Kelly noted support for recommending the BOS revise the abatement start date.

Alternate Smith clarified the ERC did not have their C.O. until October 17th and Lisa confirmed.

Vice Chairman Resutek asked for confirmation the Town Attorney reviewed this request and the policy and did not find any reason the date couldn't be changed. Lisa confirmed and stated there is nothing within the statute that defines when a town must establish the agreement or when it must be effective. It was found that the town policy sets the timeline and the BOS has the discretion to make that change.

Vice Chairman Resutek responded what the recommended change of date would be, and Chairman Kelly responded and stated they will not recommend a specific date but amend the agreement to revise the start date under their discretion.

MOVED (SMITH), SECONDED (HURLEY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO AMEND THE TAX ABATEMENT AGREEMENT FOR ELLINGTON RACQUET CLUB TO REVISE THE START DATE OF ABATEMENT; THE START DATE WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN.

3. Report: Tolland County Chamber of Commerce
Chairman Kelly reported no new updates.
4. Agricultural Initiatives
Chairman Kelly reported no new updates.
5. CEDAS Best Practices – Monthly Customer Service Satisfaction Survey Results
Chairman Kelly reported no new updates.
6. Report: Current Economic Activity

Chairman Kelly opened the newly added agenda item and stated Lisa Houlihan was approached by the First Selectman Lori Spielman, who has been approached by a few local business owners, about hosting a networking meeting for community business owners. Chairman Kelly noted the Commission has worked to arrange such events in previous years with limited success and posed the question of revisiting the concept to the Commission.

Regular Member Hurley responded in support due to the requests to the First Selectman.

Lisa Houlihan added the interest of two local businesses and followed up with the First Selectman to gather more information and background. The First Selectman remarked in previous years there were very informal gatherings among business owners and meetings went at its own pace. Upon further discussion, these gatherings were for business owners to meet each other and find out how they could help each other's business, discuss processes or issues they may have occurred; more of a discussion forum than a structured meeting. Lisa asked the Commission if they have encountered conversations with interest for this type of event.

Alternate Smith responded that a type of gathering or opportunity for the businesses in the community to meet with elected officials and department heads could have strong potential.

Chairman Kelly supported this idea. Vice Chairman Resutek also shared support of the idea and the larger concept could be more successful. Regular Member Todd noted the efforts in past years were not highly successful. Regular Member Todd remarked on past conversations with businesses about whether they joined the Tolland County Chamber of Commerce and lacked positive responses. Regular Member Todd explained this organization is explicitly designed to support these networking conversations, questions, and topics, but instead business owners reach out to the First Selectman for intown attention instead of getting involved in the larger community. Regular Member Todd supported the idea however and agreed involving town representatives.

Alternate Smith commented if this type of gathering could be hosted at a business or restaurant in town that's large enough to accommodate the community, then it provides an opportunity for those businesses to potentially gain interest and clientele. However, if the gathering was hosted in a neutral setting, then the question of funding is uncertain.

Regular Member Todd asked Lisa Houlihan if the Commission can use their funding to host an event/s at a local restaurant with a rotation schedule. Lisa responded that it would be up for policy review to see if feasible.

Chairman Kelly noted one possible reason this concept hasn't been successful in previous attempts is that it has been too broad, one type of business owner may not have any common goals or interests as another. One idea proposed by the Chairman is to host a specific industry for an event, for example the food industry, who have common interests in the community and so on.

Regular Member Todd then posed the question of whether the commission goal is to support specific businesses or all businesses. Regular Member Todd's understanding of the proposed topic aligns more with global issues about business in Ellington and economic policy in Ellington as a whole.

Regular Member Hurley responded in support of connecting all local businesses together regardless of industry, to provide the platform for businesses to potentially gain customers and relationships through other business owners. Alternate Smith noted support of Regular Member Hurley's idea and additionally noted the framing of invitation and marketing approach would be key. In addition, Alternate Smith remarked on the potential that the town could advance a conversation among businesspeople without a chamber but among the community itself. In summary, Alternate Smith reiterated the point of this type of event is connecting business owners and policy makers together could prove fruitful.

Lisa Houlihan responded to the group's discussion with support for their ideas, however, past failed efforts remained prevalent. Vice Chairman Resutek then suggested a type of interest poll or survey sent to business owners to gauge actual interest in this concept. Chairman Kelly supported this idea and noted the marketing would be key, to include the First Selectman in conjunction with the Economic Development Commission, to find a level of interest that is worth pursuing. Vice Chairman Resutek and Alternate Smith supported the idea of a survey. Regular Member Hurley commented on the nature of the Ellington close-knit community, how most businesses already know each other, there are limited new introductions to go around.

Chairman Kelly and Alternate Smith each commented on the potential success for a survey, endorsed or partnered with the First Selectman's office, to gather interest on a potential networking event. Both individuals noted the inclusion of department heads or policy makers could support a higher success rate. Lisa Houlihan ended the discussion and committed to discussing ideas with the First Selectman.

Vice Chairman Resutek asked what is developing across from Meadowview Plaza. Chairman Kelly responded that there is a pending application to the Planning and Zoning Board for new businesses to develop through a three-phase plan. Lisa shared a concept plan and site plan with the commission. Round table discussion ensued.

Regular Member Hurley asked if there is any other new economic activity. Lisa Houlihan answered that the previous night's Design Review Board meeting reviewed an application from Data Capture to expand and remodel their building. Lisa then shared the remodeling plan with the commission. Round table discussion ensued.

Lisa lastly noted the new restaurant, NoCoast Mexican Restaurant, will hopefully open soon. Round table discussion ensued.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget & Expenditures Update.

Chairman Kelly reported no new updates.

2. Approval of November 13, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (HURLEY) SECONDED (SMITH) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 13, 2024, REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS WRITTEN.

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

Chairman Kelly reported no new updates.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (RESUTEK) SECONDED (SMITH) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Dubois, Recording Clerk